

## Father Focus Groups Training Guide

Date: TBD

### Agenda

- **Welcome and check-in/icebreaker**
- **Overview of the Fatherhood TIES Study**
- **Focus group co-facilitation**
- **Research ethics**
- **Questions and Next Steps**

### 1. **Welcome and check-in slides slides#1-2: Agenda**

Welcome to the Fatherhood TIES Father Focus Groups training. In this training we'll give you an overview of Fatherhood TIES study, discuss how to co-facilitate a focus group and research ethics.

As a reminder, during this call, you can choose to mute/unmute yourself by clicking the microphone and video icons in the bottom corner of your screen. You can also access the chat from that same spot and choose who you'd like to send a chat to: everyone or a particular participant. You can always send a private message to the someone from the MDRC research team if you have a question or concern you'd like to discuss individually. Feel free to ask questions at any time. You can use the raised hand button in Zoom or put questions in the chat.

Before we get started talking about the work that we're going to be doing together, we'd like to get the chance to get to know one another.

- **Slide #3: Ice breaker**

To start out, let's go around and introduce ourselves. Please share your name and [icebreaker question here]?

### 2. **Overview of the Fatherhood TIES study**

- **Slide #4: Fatherhood TIES study**

"T.I.E.S." in Fatherhood TIES stands for Testing, Identified, Elements, for Success in Fatherhood Programs.

- **Slide #5: Overview of Fatherhood TIES**

The goal of the study is to identify and test the program elements, by that we mean, the key parts of fatherhood programs that are most effective at improving the lives of fathers who participate in these programs. In this study we are testing parenting coaching, system navigation, and engagement support

services. We hope to learn how they are effective, and programs can use them to support fathers in their programs. In the end, we hope that this research can be used to improve fathers' lives and their relationships with their children and co-parenting partners.

### 3. Focus Group Facilitation

- **Slide #6: Title slide**

The focus groups you will be a part of can be thought of as a conversation with a small group of fathers (no more than 8) that you and a member of the Fatherhood TIES research team will help guide. Focus groups are being used to learn about program experiences from fathers' perspectives. Your role will be to co-facilitate or co-lead the discussion. Your experience as a former program participant brings valuable experience and insight about fatherhood programs to the focus group. In your role as a co-facilitator, you will be partnered with a Fatherhood TIES research team member to help ask questions, stimulate conversation, and keep participants focused, interested, and engaged. You will help monitor time to ensure that the limited time is used well. Using the focus group guide, you will help make sure that all topics are covered and that everyone has an opportunity to participate at a level that is comfortable to them. You will help to enforce the group's community agreements politely and respectfully. And be prepared to restate or explain questions.

- **Slide #7: Steps for facilitating a focus group**
  - Step 1. Getting written or verbal consent from participants.
  - Step 2. Creating Community Agreements for the focus group.
  - Step 3. Building connection with fathers.
  - Step 4: Facilitating discussion

First, we'll talk about what informed consent is and why it's important in research and then we'll talk about the process we'll use for getting informed consent for the focus group.

- **Slide #8: Informed Consent**

Informed consent is a foundational practice of ethical research. It is rooted in the principle, "respect for persons". Informed consent involves providing a clear and detailed understanding to participants about what they research is and how it will be done. Informed consent ensures that participants are not forced and deceived into taking part in the study. It also protects the researchers doing the research by providing evidence that participants voluntarily agreed to take part and understood what the research was and how the research was supposed to be done. The key aspects of informed consent for Fatherhood TIES include:

- Informed consent is both a *process* and a *form*
- The Fatherhood TIES research team member and Father Advisor's role as co-facilitators, is to **inform**, not influence or coerce.
- We will share enough detailed information about the study and focus group that fathers can make an informed choice.
- We will ask fathers if they want to participate in the Fatherhood TIES focus group
  - It is their choice to participate (or not)

- If they agree to participate, they can also choose what information to share in the group

- **Slide #9: How to Get Informed Consent**

*Explain how the informed consent form and focus group scripts will be used with fathers in the focus group:*

**[Before beginning the focus group, the Fatherhood TIES team member will use a Zoom break out room to meet with each father individually to document their consent . They will share the consent form link with fathers in the chat and go over the content of it.]**

1. You are being asked to take part in focus group for the Fatherhood TIES research study
2. Length of participation: About 1 hour
3. Participation is voluntary
  - a. No penalties for not taking part such as loss of services or service quality
  - b. You can choose to not answer questions or drop out any time
4. Risks and benefits
5. Protection of personally identifiable information, as well as any exceptions to privacy

Be prepared to answer questions that fathers might have, confirm their understanding of the consent information, and ask for an explicit Yes or No to the question: Do you agree to participate in the focus group.

Now, we'll move on to step 2: Creating Community Agreements for the focus group.

- **Slide #10: Creating Community Agreements**

Community agreements represent how members of the focus group want to interact and be treated by each other during the focus (and after). It is an agreement on what every person in our group needs from each other and commits to each other to feel safe, supported, open, productive, and trusting.

We will use community agreements to help create shared understanding and mutual respect among focus group participants as well as reinforce expectations for privacy. **The Fatherhood TIES team member will take the lead on this part of the discussion.**

- **Slide #11: Steps for making Community Agreements**

- o Step 1: Explain what community agreements are and how we will use them
- o Step 2: Give some examples:

Ex: "What we say here stays here. What we learn here, leaves here." By this we mean, that we want to show respect to one another by agreeing not to share what has been said inside of the group, outside of the group. We also recognize that what is learned in the group (through the recording/transcripts) will be taken out and used for research but won't be shared in a way that will identify participants without their permission.

Ex: "Make Space/Take Space". We all have valuable thoughts and ideas to share. Be aware of how much you are speaking (and allow others to speak) or not speaking.

- Step 3: Invite fathers to add additional items and then confirm collective agreement on the list.

- **Slide #12: Building Connections with fathers**

Forming a connection with participants that facilitates comfortable and open communication. This is important to the co-facilitation process, because it can dramatically influence the willingness of participants to answer questions, and how openly and honestly, they answer the questions they are asked. The purpose of focus groups is to gain information from the perspective of participants. Rapport helps achieve this.

- **To begin building a connection with the focus group participants, we want to treat the participants as experts.** Fathers are being invited to participate in focus groups because they are viewed as having important knowledge about their experiences, needs, or perspectives that we hope to learn more about. Let fathers know that you/we are there to learn from them. This helps to establish a respectful appreciation for valuable contributions that they will make to the needs assessment.
- **Awareness of community and sensitive topics.** First and foremost, become familiar with critical issues affecting the community represented by participants. Having a basic awareness of sensitive issues so that you do not offend or insult participants unknowingly or unintentionally.
- **Your role as the facilitator.** Your role as a co-facilitator and former program participant will require you to find a balance between relating to fathers while also conveying a level of professionalism.
- **Recognizing and expressing gratitude to participants for their time and contributions.** This is one of the most important things you can do to help create rapport. Remember to thank participants for their time and participation. Let them know that the information they have shared is valuable for this project.
- **Slide #13: Facilitating the discussion**
  - **You and your Fatherhood TIES team co-facilitator will determine how to split up asking questions during the focus group. This slide includes some tips to keep in mind while asking questions.** Repeat the question – repetition gives more time to think.
  - Pause for the answer – a thoughtful nod or expectant look can convey that you want a fuller answer.
  - Repeat the reply – hearing it again sometimes stimulates conversation
  - Ask when, what, where, which, and how questions – they provoke more detailed information
  - Use neutral comments – “Anything else?”

- **Slide #14: Tips for Guiding the Discussion**

**There are also some other tips for guiding the discussion. We’ll talk a bit more about each one.**

- Listening Skills
- Probing and Clarifying Questions
- Time Management
- Record the Discussion

- **Slide #15: Listening Skills**

- **Active listening.** Active listening involves not only hearing what someone is saying, but also noticing body posture and facial gestures (i.e., any changes in nonverbal behavior) that might provide cues as to the appropriate or necessary ways to engage participants.
- **Body language and facial expressions.** Show participants that you are listening to what they are saying. Signs that you are paying attention may include leaning forward slightly, looking directly at participants while they are speaking, or nodding at appropriate times. Such behaviors not only indicate that you, as the co-facilitator, are more engaged, but also help maintain the engagement of the participants, themselves.
- **Importance of neutrality.** While showing participants that you are actively listening and interested in what they are sharing, you will also want to remain as neutral or impartial as possible, even if you have a strong opinion about something.
- **Allowing silence.** Allowing silence at times encourages elaboration by participants because it gives them a chance to think about what they want to say. More often than not, participants will fill the silence with more information. However, it is important to find a balance between keeping the conversation moving (so that you use your time well) and allowing participants adequate time to share and process what has been shared.

#### Slide #16: Using Probes and Asking Clarifying Questions

In general, you don't want to interrupt participants. If you feel that you need to follow-up with something they said by using probes, make a mental note of it and ask them about it when they have finished their thought.

- Examples of probes
  - "Please say more about that..."
  - "Could you explain what you mean by..."
  - "Could you give an example of what you mean by..."
  - "Has anyone else had a difference experience/opinion?"
- Summarizing and reflecting back what is said
  - What I'm hearing you say... is that right?
- Avoid asking leading questions
  - "Don't you think..."

#### Slide #17: Time Management.

Time management is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of co-facilitating focus groups. We want to be respectful of everyone's time while also managing the time so that all the topics can be covered. **You and the Fatherhood TIES team member will decide how you want to monitor time and who will be responsible.**

- **Keeping the focus group moving.** People love to talk about their experiences and may have a tendency to go on and on about them. It's the co-facilitators' job to politely move the conversation forward when what a participant's is sharing is less useful to the research questions. Sometimes, it is possible to do this by listening for a segue – something that the respondent talks about that is relevant to another question or set of questions. Other times, you may want to acknowledge that your time together is waning and there are some other aspects of their work and experience that you want to be sure you have time to learn about and explore, and, for this reason, you are going to move on.
- **Checking in with participants.** This could come in the form of asking the participants if you can move on to another question or whether it would be okay to talk about a certain topic. Or if

emotions run high, it could also mean asking a father if they are okay to continue or if they would like to step out for a moment.

- **Not rushing participants.** Overall, you want to achieve a balance between collecting necessary information and gathering important data that have not been anticipated. Sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference until you ask clarifying questions or probes. Again, you want to make sure that you interrupt the interview respondent as little as possible and not rush them with their answers while keeping them on course with the focus group guide.
- **Familiarity with the focus group questions and using it efficiently.** The more familiar you are with the focus group guide, the easier it will be for you to prioritize certain questions and to recognize when the respondent has already provided relevant information (indeed, adequately answered) questions you have not yet asked. This will ensure that your questions do not feel redundant to participants.

#### **Slide #18: Recording and note taking**

- Audio and/or videotaping (The MDRC research team will take care of this)
- Notetaking (The MDRC research team will take care of this)

- **Slide #19: Facilitation practice** Now, let's practice facilitating in small groups.

Note: Have participants move into breakout rooms and take turns asking questions from the protocol. Reiterate that they will have more opportunity to connect with their specific co-facilitator prior to the focus group.

## **4. Research Ethics**

- **Slide #20: Research Ethics**

**What are research ethics and why are they important?**

- **Slide #21: Research Ethics 101**

WHAT: Research Ethics are standards that govern the conduct of scientific researchers. Maintaining ethical principles is important for protecting the dignity, rights, and welfare of research participants.

WHY: 1) Research ethics promote research goals such as knowledge and truth, 2) Research ethics support values such as trust, mutual respect and fairness, and 3) Research ethics ensure that researchers can be held accountable to the public.

- **Slide #22: Key Principles for treatment of Human Subjects in Research**
  - Research Principles are rules or guidelines for doing research with "Human Subjects"
  - "Living individuals about whom an investigator conducting research obtains: data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or identifiable private information."
  - Translation: Human Subjects are people participating in research studies like Fatherhood TIES
  - Federal regulations govern the treatment of human subjects.

There are lots of kinds of research. When we do research that focuses on people (instead of saying, particle waves or jet fuel), it's called "human subjects research."

## Belmont Principles

1. Respect for persons: voluntary participation, informed consent
2. Beneficence: maximize potential benefits and minimize potential harms
3. Justice: fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research. Fair selection of research subjects

We rely on three ethical principles to make sure that the research is fair to the people who take part in it. Unfortunately, researchers haven't always treated the people they have studied fairly. You might be familiar with some of the most notorious examples like experiments carried out in Nazi concentration camps on unwilling prisoners and the Tuskegee syphilis study that denied black men in rural black communities a readily available treatment. There are more modest examples too, such as coercing people to take part in a study through power or payment or failing to safeguard sensitive information shared with researchers such as social security numbers or health records. In 1978, a federal commission published the Belmont Report to create ethical standards to prevent future harms in human subject's research. The Belmont Report focused on three main principles for ethical research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Today, federal regulations govern the treatment of research that involves human subjects and ethics boards, called "institutional review boards," review all research plans that will involve people to make sure that researchers follow the regulations and treat the people who will take part in the research with respect, minimize harms associated with the research, and employ principles of justice in the research design. We'll talk about each of these three principles for ethical research, and how they relate to the work we're doing together on this study

- o Respect for persons: Researchers show respect for a person in a human subjects study by:
  - Making participation in the study be voluntary
  - Having an informed consent process which involves explaining to study participants know what they're signing up for.

When we do research, we want to make sure we respect the subjects of the research by making sure they understand what they are signing up for when they agree to participate. We also want to make sure we protect people's right to choose whether or not they want to participate in the study. In this study, we protect participants' rights by talking through informed consent with them. We also protect their rights by making sure that they know they can leave the study at any time, and that there are no consequences for doing so. As a researcher, we practice this principle in this study by letting people choose whether or not they want to participate in the focus group and make sure they understand how their information will be used. As we mentioned earlier, the Fatherhood TIES research team member/co-facilitator will take care of collecting informed consent from fathers.

We also have obligations to show respect for persons in how we treat focus group participants. If someone chooses to leave the focus group, respect their decision and don't pressure them to participate. If you are confused about the project or how focus group information will be used, ask us! If you have a question, someone else probably does too, and we'll all benefit from talking through your questions together.

- o **Beneficence: Obligation to maximize potential benefits and minimize potential harms.**
  - The research we do should maximize potential benefits and minimize potential harms to anyone who participates in our studies and society.

As researchers, we want to make sure we minimize the potential risks that study participants encounter. In this study, we need your help to make sure that we maximize the potential benefits to focus group participants and minimize the risks. The questions themselves are not risky but sometimes the conversation can go in the direction of sharing their feelings and this can be hard. We have to be ready to support fathers who might be having a hard time and connect them with the right people in the program who can help. The main risk is sharing information about focus group participants with people not authorized to see or hear it. Why would this be a problem? [Allow the group to brainstorm ideas]

You can help maximize benefits and minimize risks by protecting the privacy of what your fellow focus group participants share in terms of personal information, stories, and thoughts in our group settings. What is shared in this group stays in this group. As researchers, you have the responsibility to protect what your fellow focus group participants say. This applies to what you might see in their Zoom background, their names, stories or thoughts that they share, and personal details that we discuss. It's also important to follow data security procedures and not send data or personal information via phone or email to minimize risk to all the participants.

- o **Justice:**
  - The benefits and burdens of research are distributed fairly:
    - o no community or group unduly experiences the burdens
    - o no community or group is excluded from the benefits.
  - It's important to select research subjects fairly and equally.

As researchers, we have to make sure that the people we choose to participate in research studies are chosen fairly. For example, research of innovative therapies or medicines must be available not only to people who can afford them. On the other hand, groups shouldn't be selected for research simply because it is convenient to do so, such as people who are confined to institutions. Justice is a core goal of the co-facilitated focus group method. In this study, we focus on empowering people to share their voice and perspectives. As researchers, you should practice justice while co-facilitating focus groups. It is important to treat focus group participants ethically. One way that you can help make sure that benefits are distributed fairly is to help share results of the study with the program and/or community once they are available from the research team (they often are in the form of a brief, report, or blog post)..

Now, we want to talk about privacy

- **Slide #23: Privacy**



Privacy refers to the agreement between participants and researchers about how participants information will be handled, used, shared. It provides security that personal information shared for the purpose of research will not be shared in a way that would allow a participant to be identified without their permission. As co-facilitators, you will help assure fathers that the information they share will remain private. You can do this by NOT sharing any information about specific people in the focus group except with the Fatherhood TIES study team members. This means not telling family or friends who attended the group and what was said in the group.

Before we move on, are there any questions about research ethics or what your responsibilities are in being part of the research?

#### **Slide #24: Questions and Next Steps**

Before we wrap up, we want to open the floor to any questions that you might have.

The focus group will be on XX at XX p.m. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the focus group interview guide before then. Connect with your co-facilitator to discuss how the focus group will be run (will you alternate asking questions, each take certain sections of questions, etc)

It's ok if you don't remember everything we talked about today. We will email you a copy of this PowerPoint to refer to. You can also always call us at Fatherhood TIES hotline (855) 907-6696 or email us at [FatherhoodTIES@mdrc.org](mailto:FatherhoodTIES@mdrc.org) if you have questions.